

Teach, Learn, Develop: Sweat, Breathe, Yoga.

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Studies in Education

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Education

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St. Catharines, Ontario

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Abstract

Teach, Lean Develop: Sweat, Breathe, Yoga is a Handbook for the Educator intended to be a practical tool for educators to integrate yoga into their classrooms and for the betterment of students. The handbook offers teachers several activities and ideas to get them started using yoga in the classroom-these activities can be modified to suit different ages, abilities, and classroom levels. The project includes a look at the literature alongside my opinions and experience from what I have experienced while teaching yoga in the classroom. The handbook itself is intended to assist experienced and inexperienced educators by offering some ideas and activities that will encourage educators to explore using yoga in the classroom. After the completion of the handbook 2 educators reviewed it, and information was collected with regards to how they saw it fitting into their classrooms and the curriculum in general. They provided critiques, constructive feedback, and further recommendations for the handbook.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This is a handbook of a child-centered yoga program within the school setting and is particularly aimed at educators to enable them to provide a yoga program that combines the mental and physical domains of yoga for educators to help meet the needs of their students. This handbook is aimed at helping educators introduce yoga and self-regulation into their classrooms.

Students, school, and life are constantly changing and these changes are impacting our students like never before. Whereas childhood was once considered a time with little stress, students are now experiencing more stress and greater stressors in their daily lives (Slawta, Bentley, Smith, Kelly, & Syman-Degler, 2008) while receiving less time for physical activity, play, and enjoyment. Many teachers complain that the many curriculum expectations have resulted in less time for physical activity in school settings. Daily physical activity (DPA), the participation in movement to encourage students to become more active, is expected to be 20 minutes incorporated into each school day, but in my observation this does not occur in many schools at which I have worked. The number of obese children has almost quadrupled in the last 30 years, and this increase is in line with the increases in heart disease and type-2 diabetes (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 2013). There are many benefits of physical activity, but children either are not given enough opportunities or do not take opportunities that are provided to them to participate. Providing children with these opportunities and the ability to make informed choices when it comes to incorporating physical activity into their lives can positively change their lives and the incidence of these negative diseases (Slawta et al., 2008). Some advantages of being physically

active for children are musculoskeletal health, increased cardiovascular health, and overall fitness (Janssen & Le Blanc, 2010). In its own way, physical activity additionally tackles mental health, such as anxiety and depression (Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010). The focus on mental health in recent years has put a focus on the need to take care of minds as well as our bodies. Yoga imbues peace and equanimity in both the body and the mind through its mindfulness approach (Baptiste, 2002). In my own observations in schools, there are increased levels of mental and physical stress in students, and they are not prepared with the skills to self-regulate their feelings and are not given ample opportunities to be physically active throughout the day. Therefore this program includes ways to model self-regulation for children while giving them opportunities to move throughout the day.

Yoga is the combination of physical, mental, and spiritual disciplines (Baptiste, 2010). It is the ideal blend of sweat and serenity; in Sanscrit, yoga literally means to unite or integrate. After being practiced for hundreds of years, yoga has recently become more mainstream, the result being a proliferation of yoga programs specialized for children and students (Ragoonaden, Berg, & Cherkowski, 2012). A yoga program that is specialized for young people focuses more on activities, movement, and open talk and less on the intricate flows that a typical adult yoga class would be based on (Powell, Gilchrist, & Stapley, 2008). This children's yoga program is an equal balance between physical and mental domains. A flow in yoga is an organized sequence of poses put together and done in a specific order and are meant to "flow" together – one position leads you in the next. Children's yoga does not focus itself on flows because of the complex nature and the lengthy concentration needed (Powell, Gilchrist, & Stapley,

2008). Rather, children's yoga focus is on doing specific poses and having fun trying to master these poses – no matter how long it takes for understanding of the pose to occur (YOGAed, 2007). While trying to gain control of these poses the mindfulness aspect of yoga is emphasized: the breathing, being in the moment in a stress-free situation and children are free to be who they are (Powell, Gilchrist, & Stapley, 2008). Another aspect of a specialized yoga program for students is its child-centered approach; therefore the yoga teacher does not plan the whole class in advance, it can take shape based on students feelings and behaviours that day. Yoga can be incorporated on-the-go into any aspect of a child's day. If students come in with a lot of energy and activity, the intention of the day will be breathing and calmness—this is accomplished by the positions and movements that are done but also the accompanying activities. If students are sluggish and upset the physical and mindful activities of the class will take on a more upbeat atmosphere.

Yoga provides children the opportunity to practice mindfulness, self-regulation, and the ability to participate in physical activity simultaneously (White, 2009). The mindfulness aspect of yoga is what sets this program and study apart. Yoga insists that one needs to not fix oneself and instead start being you (Baptiste, 2002). Yoga's approach to reducing stress is that of a total life transformation, Baptiste (2002) indicates that he cannot change stressors, but yoga can show you how to remold your mind so that your reaction and perception of stress change. It is hoped that combining a peaceful mind with a healthy body will hopefully result in a less stressed and more genuine child.

This handbook provides the tools for students to self-regulate their feelings and to participate in physical fitness in the hopes of enhancing both their mental and physical

health. The goal of this is two fold: Teaching students to self-regulate gives you more time in your day to teach and deal with students that have problems that reach far past self-regulation—time that was perhaps previously spent on behaviour management for the whole class. Second, it give students life skills that will stay with them throughout their lives—physical fitness, mindfulness, and self-regulation all enhance one’s mental and physical health.

Background of the Problem

As a child who lived for sports, I see the absence of physical activity as a problem in many student’s lives. Participation in activity taught organizational skills, improved concentration, improved marks, heightened self-esteem, confidence, and created an overall healthier body. An absence of these attributes in many students may lead to negative effects in the future. Designed to Move (Let’s Move: Active Schools, 2013) is an active schools initiative that wants to get more kids moving and being active. This organization has recently published a video, along with research, regarding how this generation of children will be the first generation to not outlive their parents (you can view *5 Extra Years* online). The video *5 Extra Years* shows a variety of young children talking about what they would try to accomplish if they were given an extra 5 years, because it has been found that this generation’s life expectancy is 5 years less than their parent’s. A startling statistic from this work is that only 1 in 3 children are active every day (Let;s Move: Active Schools, 2013). The Designed to Move initiative lists other benefits of being active such as increased concentration, attention, and test scores and improved attendance at school (Let’s Move: Active Schools, 2013). The solution may seem obvious to some, but physical activity must be included more often in children’s

daily lives—an important goal is to make physical activity fun, positive, and captivating for students (Let's Move: Active Schools, 2013). Trying to create early and positive physical activity experiences for children will hopefully increase the chances of their continuing to live a healthy lifestyle.

I have been practicing yoga for 5 years, and only after immersing myself in a 30-day challenge did the full benefits of yoga become clear and the question arose: How yoga, over organized sports, be beneficial to students as well? Sports, unfortunately for some children, include competition, evaluation, and ranking, and these aspects of sports do not appeal to every student. Yoga's unique way of programming allows for a non judgmental space where people work only to their ability and work together, no matter their skill level, to achieve something (Baptiste, 2002). Sports were my domain; they provided (and still do) an outlet for me because my personality meshed with the goals of the sport. For me, sports reduced stress and therefore became my safe haven—but because of the above aspects of sport it is not a positive experience for all children and in some cases can create more stress in these student's lives. Since yoga also allows for increased concentration, attention, and test scores it is recommended to use this opportunity to practice (learn) this in a school setting (Ragoonaden, et al. 2012).

Yoga is one of a kind because of its focus on mindfulness and connecting the body and mind through practice and activities. A yoga program consists of both movement and activities aimed at helping students relax, exercise, gain self-confidence, have fun, and express themselves without worries or the added stress of outer influences. In a study conducted by Gupta, Khera, Vempati, Sharma, and Bijlani (2006), researchers examined the relationship between a yoga lifestyle and anxiety. These researchers stated

that “yoga is one [of the approaches] that combines physical elements of a healthy lifestyle with prescriptions for abiding mental peace” (Gupta et al., 2006, p. 42).

The difficulty in studying yoga is that, although it is a very ancient practice, there seems to be a resistance to teaching yoga in schools as seen through the many complaints from parents resisting yoga in the classroom (Douglass, 2010). The resistance comes from the third discipline: spiritual. In one specific case, parents in a California school sued the school because they view the teaching of yoga as synonymous with teaching Eastern religion (Graham Reuters, Feb 22, 2013) even though yoga combines both physical and mental disciplines. The ruling of the case determined that yoga is the combination of mental and physical benefits and there can be no religious or spiritual intonation when yoga is taught in the classroom (Graham Reuters, Feb 22, 2013). Child-centered yoga programs uniting physical and mental disciplines are unique in their ability to combat both imbalanced minds and unhealthy bodies.

Although some research exists on this topic there are many holes in the research so far. The widespread phenomenon of yoga is only a recent trend, but the existence of yoga for so many years indicates that it is here to stay. Yoga with students is not done as a traditional yoga flow class—it incorporates games, body awareness, mindfulness, self-regulation, and above all, movement. Yoga is well known for reducing stress and anxiety (White, 2009). All children deserve to find something that will allow them to live the best life possible. For me that was sports, but I truly believe yoga can help all sorts of students—and aid them each in an individualistic way.

Statement of Problem Context

Stress can induce a range of negative outcomes such as behavioural, social-

emotional difficulties, and poor academic performance (Mendelson et al., 2010).

Programs that have a mindfulness-based approach work at enhancing self-regulatory capacities and can contribute to the relief of stress (Mendelson et al., 2010). The problem lies in determining how adults and educators can enhance the experiences that lead children to a healthier life. The sports that are typically practiced in school, as we have already discussed, may not be that avenue for all students. For children who are less healthy with regard to both their minds and bodies, a program that aims to address both of these simultaneously is desirable. Yoga programs specialized for students are available, but the research regarding them is vague and the benefits have not been fully delved into. Determining the benefits of a children's yoga program on both mental and physical stress can be desirable for school boards and educators as a whole.

Canada's physical activity guidelines recommend that children should be at least moderately active for 30 minutes a day and aiming to progress to 90 minutes of daily physical activity (Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010). This is not always easy to implement into all students' lives, so if we, as teachers, can find a way to implement some activity and model mindfulness and self-regulation in our classrooms, we will be both benefiting our students' lives now and preparing them for lifelong healthy choices. Janssen and LeBlanc (2010) state some recommendations for promoting daily physical activity; one of the suggestions is that students should participate in different types of physical activity—combining endurance, flexibility and core strength in order to obtain health results. A yoga program designed for children aims to combine these aspects of physical activity with Pranayama, the act of breathing (Ellsworth, 2010).

The age of onset for many mental health disorders is during childhood or

adolescence (Khalsa, Hickey-Schultz, Cohen, Steiner, & Cope, 2012). More attempts at intervening at these ages could lighten the mental health burden that many adolescents face. Intervention could prevent the prevalence of mental health disorders that occur later in life (Khalsa et al., 2012). Khalsa et al. (2012) state that many schools have stress management initiatives in their schools to teach and model adequate coping skills, but few of these programs utilize mind-body skills (i.e., yoga and mindfulness). Combined mind and body approaches, such as this program, are known to teach effective self-regulation and stress management skills (Khalsa et al., 2012).

Purpose of This Study

The handbook is designed to be a practical tool for educators to allow the instruction of yoga to enhance the learning environment and lives of their students. This is a program that differs from a traditional adult yoga class in that the typical flows are not followed, thus potentially appealing more to children. It is more appealing to children because it consists of fun games, a break from the regular day of school work and desk work. In my experience, when I am on the carpet with primary-aged students and I see them losing focus, as soon as I tell them “raise your hands in the sky and reach as high up as you can” their faces light up and the attitude of the room changes. With so much time spent on planning lessons, behaviour management and helping out with extra-curricular activities, there is little time for educators to investigate the literature and study the benefits that yoga can have on students and how it can be used in the classroom. This handbook will be the attempt of one teacher to share her expertise in the area of yoga for students and create ways that yoga can be used in classroom settings in an easy-to-understand and simple-to-use manner.

Objectives of the Handbook

1. To assist the educator in determining appropriate yoga and self-regulation moves and activities for his or her elementary-aged students.
2. To coordinate multiple resources and other information and organize the information in a clear manner for educators to incorporate into school settings.
3. To assist educators in planning and delivering a fun and effective program that encourages students to participate and enjoy.
4. To promote the use of yoga, or a balanced lifestyle, as an essential part of every child's life for his or her own physical and mental health as they grow and become their own people.

Rationale

There is a need to study yoga with children because of the lack of knowledge and the apparent need for stress relief and self-regulation in the classroom and children's lives. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some schools have implemented yoga into their classrooms—whether as a whole school act or in individual classrooms. Even more, various schools include a yoga program as an option for their students as an extra-curricular activity – for example a local school offers yoga as one of their after-school sport options. From personal observation, yoga in the schools is generally started and run by one teacher who is passionate about what yoga can do for the students and school as a whole. After completing a yoga kids' training program, I found the support from other teachers for the implementation of yoga in the schools to allow the benefits of yoga, movement, and mindfulness to manifest themselves in students. Teachers would welcome me into their classrooms to implement yoga into their students' lives. This

handbook can help to fast-track the process of introducing yoga into the classroom for the betterment of the students and the school atmosphere. It is the aim of this handbook to give reason for the Ontario government to implement yoga, or a similar program, into the Ontario curriculum (past the physical education curriculum). This study is important to help increase the amount of physical activity and self-regulation skills in children because children are sitting more than ever before and this could not be more worrisome to a future educator (Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010). In addition to lack of physical fitness, children are feeling more stressed and anxious. This handbook will hopefully provide information for educators who want to integrate yoga into their classrooms.

The new knowledge that this generation of children will be the first generation to not outlive their parents is motivation enough to do anything we can to better the lives of all children. It has been said that stress takes years off your life by contributing to problems such as obsessive thinking and insomnia, and it is well known that physical activity adds years to life, so we need to take this information and enhance the lives of the children around us (Khalsa et al., 2012). Combining both mindfulness and physical activity will hopefully benefit children's overall wellbeing, and this handbook will help educators incorporate this into their classrooms (Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010). In Thygeson, Hooke, Clapsaddle, Robbins, and Moquist's (2010) study, it is explicitly stated that yoga with children works on the following areas of physical fitness: posture, muscle tone, circulation, pulmonary function, coordination, and flexibility. Along with the physical benefits, yoga is used as a stress management technique by fostering relaxation, reducing levels of anxiety, and promoting regular sleep patterns (Thygeson et al., 2010), teaching and subsequently monitoring self-regulation in children

A yoga program can utilize just the mental and physical aspects of yoga; the spiritual aspect does not need to be addressed in a children's yoga program (Douglass, 2010). Teaching self-regulation and using yoga to provide movement breaks in the classroom will allow for more teaching time throughout the day and more vibrant learners in your classroom; do not just take my word for it, find out for yourself through this handbook of yoga's effective power in transformation.

Outline of Subsequent Chapters

Chapter Two will take a look at the literature already out there on yoga and yoga with children. This will map out where the knowledge on yoga lies now in relation to the mental and physical domains and will present other findings and implications other studies have found. Both empirical studies as well as published books by yoga instructors themselves will be used to analyze where the research lies now and where it can be taken.

My methodology and procedures and justification of needs are outlined in Chapter Three. I based my methodology and justification for needs on personal observations and experience in the classroom. I spoke with other teachers with whom I used yoga in their classrooms for feedback and advice on what they would see as easy to implement and easy to use in their classrooms.

Chapter Four consists of the handbook, and last, Chapter Five will discuss and conclude the report and answer why this handbook is important to educators. Educators will provide comments and recommendations and insider insight for the handbook. The study will be summarized with clear conclusions and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

“Adolescents are confronted with a variety of life stressors from both school and home. Unmanaged stress is now believed to be a contributing and/or causal factor in the development of mental health and behavioural problems that are prevalent in adolescents” (Khalsa, et al., 2012, p.81). As time progresses, an increasing number of schools are learning of the benefits that yoga can bring to the classroom. Some teachers see yoga as a means for managing classroom behaviour and aiding in student learning (Williamson, 2013) and many see yoga as a means for improving student health (Baptiste, 2002; Douglass, 2010; Stewart Stanec, Forneris & Theuerkauf, 2010). Studies and personal recollections of yoga show benefits to students’ mental and physical health and increasing their concentration (or mindfulness) as well. As time goes on, and as more research surfaces, more teachers are opening up their classrooms and minds to the many ways that yoga can benefit students. Educators are warming up to the idea of applying the practice of yoga in their classrooms after seeing how it can help with behaviour management, concentration, and stress levels in students in an educational setting, such as the classroom or as a whole school initiative (Williamson, 2013).

This chapter will outline the links between yoga and education, mental health, physical health, and mindfulness already noted in research, and the connections with self-regulation and the need for this in the classroom will be highlighted.

Yoga and Education

Yoga is far from being utilized in every classroom; as mentioned earlier. some schools have resistance (from both teachers and parents) to teaching yoga in the classroom. Resistance mainly comes from the belief that yoga is teaching Eastern

religion in the school, and this therefore violates the separation of church and state which is supposed to be found in the public school system (Douglass, 2010). This does not mean that yoga is not utilized in many classrooms to improve education and physical fitness; schools are gradually catching on to the benefits of educational-based yoga (Douglass, 2010). The elementary school Ontario curriculum lists yoga as a part of its physical education mandate (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005). Commonly, many educators skim through this in the gymnasium with no rhyme or reason and then forget about it and never revisit it again. Some teachers fully involve themselves into including yoga in the classroom and can find ways to incorporate yoga into everyday lesson plans and transitions between classes or subjects; other teachers have some reservations about trying yoga out in the classroom or in the gymnasium (Williamson, 2013). Many B.C. and eastern province schools have fully integrated yoga initiatives into the classroom. Teachers who practice yoga themselves may be more inclined to include yoga in their classrooms (Guber & Kalish, 2007).

Yoga classes generally begin with an intention; an intention can be anything from strength or calmness to a physical demand, such as increased flexibility. Mental intentions can include being more mindful or increasing concentration. How can intention setting be used with children? An example that Ragoonaden et al. (2012) provide is to use yoga as a part of a classroom's morning DPA to set an intention for the rest of the school day and sustain the intended behaviour past just the yoga class in order to keep its relevance. Using an intention to guide yoga in classrooms gives teachers the option to come back to the intention to keep students mindful of their behaviours and actions. A teacher who piloted the use of Integral Yoga, using yoga throughout the day

to enhance and accompany lessons in the classroom noted the positive differences in students' interactions with one another when intentions were set, repeated, and reminded throughout the day (Ragoonaden et al., 2012). In the classroom, intentions can be made more broad and creative to make curricular connections and keep the learning going throughout the day. Students can also individually set independent intentions; children can make a "goal" for the day (Ragoonaden, et al., 2012).

Authors Stewart et al. (2010) purport that the implementation of yoga into school communities can prove immensely helpful and see it as a way to enrich wellbeing of students (and teachers). Yoga should not take over as the main form of physical education offered in schools; rather, it should be used to increase physical activity throughout the day for students. Research has shown that while using yoga in educational facilities, students can transfer breathing and relaxation techniques that they are taught to other areas such as test-taking or before a big performance (Stewart Stanec et al., 2010). Additionally, breathing techniques that are found in yoga have been linked to improving memory and student's cognitive capacities (Douglass, 2010).

Previous research done on yoga in schools indicates that there was a decrease in helplessness and aggressive mindsets for students involved in a yoga program that was combined with relaxation techniques (Stewart Stanec et al., 2010). Another study examined the effects of a yoga program on children with attention problems and concluded that two 30-minute sessions a week of yoga had a positive effect on attention span in these students (Stewart Stanec et al., 2010).

How can we include yoga in students' daily lives in order to achieve these benefits? Stewart Stanec et al. (2010) offer some suggestions on how to incorporate yoga

into the school community in addition to Daily physical activity (DPA) activities. The first suggestion is to use yoga as an energizer or a way to calm down (Stewart Stanec et al., 2010); a warm-up can be as simple as just doing a few poses to get the students' bodies moving and, especially for younger students, creating awareness about their bodies. For a cool-down, most yoga classes conclude with *Savasana* (a pose intended to look like a corpse); this pose encompasses total relaxation by calming the brain and lowering blood pressure (Stewart Stanec et al., 2010). This pose can be done at any point in the day when the energy of the classroom is too high; it is suggested that it be used at the end of the day (Baptiste, 2002). The pose has also been shown to relieve signs of mild depression, stress, headaches, fatigue, and insomnia (Baptiste, 2002; Stewart Stanec et al., 2010).

Strategies for Using Yoga Throughout a Program

Including yoga into school communities can be accomplished by integrating yoga into physical education. This can be accomplished by practicing the different poses and creating various flows as a fun alternative to the usual competitive and skill-based activities that are in the physical education classroom (Stewart Stanec et al., 2010; White, 2009). Incorporating yoga opens up the opportunity to show students another aspect of lifelong leisure physical activities. Authors Stewart Stanec et al. (2010) add that using yoga in school can show students the benefits of yoga on their physical and mental wellbeing and therefore encourage them to value yoga as a means of life long wellbeing (Stewart Stanec et al., 2010). Over and above just being yoga, it teaches them to find something that they enjoy and will lead them to love a well-balanced lifestyle.

Additionally, schools can create lunchtime or after-school programs (Stewart Stanec et al., 2010) to allow students to take part in an extra curricular activity without fear of being cut or “not being good enough.” It is suggested that school counselors adopt some of the yoga and breathing techniques to utilize when students come to them with issues (Stewart Stanec et al., 2010). The last suggestion is for the staff of the school to get involved with yoga to help teachers gain a healthy lifestyle and reap all the benefits of yoga for themselves, including a decrease in stress (Stewart Stanec et al., 2010).

Further, from these recommendations, Douglass (2010) offers the use of yoga “time-ins” rather than giving misbehaving students a “time-out.” A time-in consists of students using mindfulness to close their eyes and look inside themselves to discover the reason for their misbehaviours (Douglass, 2010). Using the mindfulness aspect of yoga in this way demonstrates how yoga can be actively utilized in the classroom and students can take the skill to use in their everyday lives when they are feeling stressed or uncomfortable. Using time-ins is an option to teach and model self-regulation for students to understand the reasoning for their behaviours and ways that they could better act or react in the situation.

There are many ways to use yoga in the classroom and ample opportunities to get kids moving throughout the day. Some simple examples are using yoga for transitions, using yoga to practice spelling words, and practicing breathing before speeches, tests, and other big events. Yoga can be incorporated into every aspect of the curriculum (Guber & Kalish, 2007).

Recently, yoga is being seen in school communities and classrooms because educators choose to concentrate their focus of teaching yoga (sometimes referred to as

relaxation) on engaging students' bodies and minds. It is thought that the ancient practice of yoga was derived from Hindu and Indian traditions; regardless of its ancestral roots the Western world can adapt and mold aspects of yoga that seem the most beneficial to use in our classrooms with our students. Douglass (2010) explains that yoga can easily be translated to remove any Sanskrit language and therefore eliminate the "Eastern religion" aspect of yoga. Like scientific words, all yoga poses have a "common name" as well (i.e., tree pose, corpse pose, warrior pose, etc.). Using these words for poses in the classroom can create a better environment for parents to feel comfortable with the practice of yoga for their children (Douglass, 2010).

Yoga and Mental Health

Mental illnesses can take a variety of forms from stress to anxiety to depression and eating disorders to schizophrenia (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2013). There is a lot of fear associated with mental illnesses, but recent awareness has shone new light on teaching society to not be afraid and on educating people about mental illnesses (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2013). Hollywood actors and elite athletes are speaking up about mental illness and mental health; it is becoming less taboo to discuss. Mental health is defined as the balance between everything in your life: social, physical, spiritual, emotional, and economic (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2013).

The fight against mental health is becoming increasingly prominent as the stigma of mental health is lifting. People are struggling to find that balance in their lives, and their minds (and subsequently their lives) are paying the price (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2013). Furthermore, *Silver Linings Playbook*, a recent Hollywood movie,

shed light on the stigma surrounding mental illnesses. Actress Jennifer Lawrence took time in her Oscar press release to talk about how we need to remove the stigma regarding mental illness. She wondered why it is “O.K. to have to take medicine for your asthma but as soon as you take medicine for your mind there is a stigma?” (Jennifer Lawrence, personal communication, February 2013). This increased awareness from role models will hopefully decrease the stigma and encourage people to look after their mental health and take care of their mental illnesses.

Stress is a maladaptive coping behaviour to events and situations. When stress is prolonged and excessive, it can become pathological to one’s mental health and general health (Gupta et al., 2006). Both psychiatric and systemic disorders stem from persistent anxiety and/or stress (Gupta et al., 2006). How can we assist children in finding balance and establishing good mental health at a young age to sustain throughout life?

Many studies point out the beneficial effect that physical fitness and exercise have on mental health (Galantino, Galbavy, & Quinn, 2008; Gupta et al., 2006; Streeter et al., 2010;). Yoga is often pointed out as a method to manage stress and alleviate anxiety and depression (Javnbakht, Hajazi & Ghasemi, 2009). Streeter et al. (2010) maintain that yoga can also be used to decrease symptoms of epilepsy. Yoga’s combination of physical fitness, breathing, and mindfulness combines to significantly decrease anxiety and reduce levels of perceived stress in one’s life (Javnbakht et al., 2009).

The reason yoga works so well is because of its ability to work the mind and the body simultaneously medicine for the mind-body connection. There is an intimate relation between the body and the mind (Galantino et al., 2008). Essentially, if your body is stressed, your mind will be in a state of stress (and vice versa). The physiological

benefits of yoga help students to become resilient to stressful situations through the increased ability to deal with stress and to develop additional coping strategies that students gain through doing yoga (Galantino et al., 2008). “Yoga is one [approach] that combines the physical elements of a healthy lifestyle with prescriptions for abiding mental peace” (Gupta, et al., 2006, p. 42). The self-regulation and mindfulness aspects of yoga lead to quieting of the mental space.

A study by Gupta et al. (2006) found that relaxation in yoga helps decrease a racing heart, palpitations, dry mouth, sweating, and restlessness. It was also found to decrease blood pressure and reduce scores of trait anxieties. This study used a concentrated 8-day yoga program that utilized both theory and practice for 3-4 hours a day. The results from this study may be argued in that, since the testing was done cumulatively each day, there may be a greater effect; on the other end of the spectrum spreading the program out can give subjects more time to use and learn from the skills they are gaining (Gupta et al., 2006).

Streeter et al's. (2010) study examined which had a greater effect on mood and anxiety: yoga or walking? Participants were randomly assigned to either the walking group or yoga group it was found that there were greater improvements in mood and larger decreases in anxiety for the group that was assigned the yoga intervention (Streeter et al., 2010). The researchers carefully accounted for metabolic output and ensured that both activities resulted in the same metabolic output. This study was the first study to produce findings that indicate a positive correlation between thalamic GABA levels and scores on mood and anxiety scores. More research will have to be done in this area but

the results are promising and demonstrate yoga's ability to affect mood and states of anxiety and stress (Streeter et al., 2010).

Khalsa et al. (2012) acknowledge that there are not many published studies of yoga in the classroom, and the ones that are published are focused on single group trials or conducted in special populations or schools, and therefore the results are not generalizable to other students. Using senior students in high school, participants that were in the active treatment group took part in yoga sessions two or three times a week and followed a program called "YOGAed." The results indicate that "yoga may promote the kind of equanimity and personal resources that are associated with successful coping with stress and adversity and a protective/preventive effect of yoga on mental health" (Khalsa et al., 2012). This study demonstrates yoga's ability to help with students' coping strategies, such as self-regulation.

Yoga is known for its ability to calm and relax the mind; many of yoga's techniques aim at finding a balance within your mind and finding a balance within yourself. Through these past studies, it is shown that yoga works to alleviate symptoms of mental illnesses.

Yoga and Physical Fitness

Yoga engages many different aspects of physical fitness; it is often defined as a "form of leisure-time physical activity that [can be] performed on a repeated basis during an extended period of time, with the intention of improving fitness, performance, or health" (Galantino et al., 2008, p. 68). The most noted physical benefits that can be gained from regular yoga practice are flexibility, neuromuscular, cardiopulmonary, and musculoskeletal.

With the emergence of what is seemingly a resurgence in the practice of yoga, many people are looking to yoga classes and studios as a way to increase their physical fitness: get in shape and get stronger. Newer forms of yoga, those generally practiced at newer studios, surely accomplish this through cardiovascular workouts complete with strength training, muscular toning, and flexibility. Baron Baptiste, founder of Baptiste Power Yoga, structures his quick paced classes in (generally) hot rooms to get the heart pumping even more (2002). Yoga allows oxygen to move to the brain and awaken the body. Using light movement throughout the day increases attention and learning throughout the day (Guber & Kalish, 2007)

Elementary schools are essential to students' developing a love for lifelong physical fitness (Hutchinson, 2013). Repeated studies have not found an effect of physical education class on the waistlines of students because the classes are not focused enough on developing children or physical education lesson plans in the right ways (Hutchinson, 2013). It is often seen that a regular classroom teacher is running a physical education class with no prior experience, training, or skill sets. Instead a specialized gym teacher should be utilized because of the shift of focus to basic skills such as: coordination, balance, core strength, and body awareness (Hutchinson, 2013; Peck, Kehle, Bray, & Theodore, 2005; White, 2009). Hutchinson reports that these specialized teachers take advantage of basic yoga movements to help children perfect these basic skills and give them confidence in moving and getting to know their bodies (Hutchinson, 2013; Ragoonaden et al., 2012).

Guidelines governing children and youth's physical activity recommend children should be active for 90 minutes a day (this can be broken down in accumulated 10 and 15

minute blocks). Approximately 60 minutes should consist of moderate physical activity and 30 minutes of vigorous activity (Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010). The guidelines also suggest that various types of physical activity are incorporated, children should engage in activities to increase endurance, flexibility, and balance (Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010). Yoga permeates all three of these domains and can be used towards student's 60 minutes of moderate physical activity.

If we want to introduce a lifelong love of physical fitness into student's lives, we need to move away from the added stress of competitiveness and skill-based aspects of gym class 24/7. Gym class needs to have areas where all students can excel and different skill levels are not made obvious by centering out those who cannot get the ball in the net (or even get the ball to go anywhere!). Yoga is an avenue that all children can excel at with out comparing across students or without any outside influenced skills needed

Studies have found positive impacts of yoga on neuromuscular performance such as motor planning, performance, and mental and social acuity (Galantino et al., 2008).

Yoga and Mindfulness

Our minds are remarkable, and the brain can perform remarkable acts for us. Anyone who has ever played sports has heard of the power of visualization—if you can visualize yourself doing it, you can do it. Studies have been conducted to confirm just that—our minds control our realities.

Mindfulness can be used to change the realities around us; creating a mental quietness can allow children to focus and re-center (White, 2009). With the increase in mental anxiety and mental illnesses with children, educators need to give students an outlet: ways to self-regulate and deal with stress. White (2009) suggests having students

bring one thing that worries them to mind and then use imagery to watch it float away and experience the difference in how they feel. Self-regulation activities such as this can be included as a whole class experience for tests to remove the anxiety associated with grading.

Mindfulness and meditation can loosely be used interchangeably; both are used as attempts to focus on just the present moment. LiveScience (2013) argues that this is why mindfulness can improve test results; if one can reduce the amount his or her mind wanders, one can improve performance. Mindfulness and concentration can also be used together to describe what is going on in the mind—during mindfulness one’s mind is “concentrated” (Williamson, 2013). By allowing students to practice mindfulness and self-regulation we are allowing them to lessen the mental noise and stress.

Yoga is well known for its role in physical fitness, and this is the primary reason most people practice yoga, but the aspect of mindfulness outweighs the aspect of fitness (Baptiste, 2002). Yoga challenges your body in hard-to-hold, or hard-to-control positions and you are urged to come back to your breath and bring yourself into the moment.

Peck, Kehle, Bray and Theodore (2005) investigated the effects that yoga had on children with attention problems in school. The study engaged students for 30 minutes twice a week with deep breathing and relaxation exercises. Performance on time-based tasks was evaluated and it was observed that there was a significant improvement in concentration in these students (Peck et al., 2005). In addition to increased concentration, students’ general tension and stress symptoms decreased and there was a positive correlation with academic performance after the yoga intervention. Although this study was small and conducted with children with attention problems (not attention deficit

disorder), it shows the positive effects that the physical fitness aspects of yoga and mindfulness can have on concentration and the ability to improve academic performance.

An Atlanta-based teacher explained her experience to Lisa Ann Williamson (2013) from *Education Digest*. Chelsea Jackson, teacher, had been practicing yoga on her own and reaping the benefits, so she figured she would try the same on her chaotic classroom full of energetic students. She tried to eliminate distractions from their day and taught students how to focus on their breathing, and even introduced some simple yoga poses. Jackson found that this made her classroom run more smoothly, with increased attention spans in her students and the children taking initiative to self-regulate and resolve their own conflicts. The most impressive part was that students would request “a few minutes for breath” before standardized testing—and the scores skyrocketed to some of the highest in the school (Williamson, 2013).

Williamson (2013) found another teacher, Susan Solvang, to share her experience with mindfulness in the classroom, and she found that by using yoga and mindfulness in the classroom she sees more kind, attentive, caring, and aware students around the school; they monitor themselves and change behaviours and actions accordingly. This example of self-regulation demonstrates how beneficial it can be to the entire school community.

Using mindfulness training and modeling self-regulation can improve both students’ behavior and abilities in school.

Conclusion

Since children spend a significant amount of their waking hours at school, there need to be role models at school for students to look up to and to model these health

physical and mental behaviours (Williamson, 2013). Teachers can aid this process by participating in the practice of yoga along with their students and using yoga, or movement, in every aspect of the day that they can—creating an intention as mentioned before can be a way for the entire class, teacher and students, to be on the same page for the day (Williamson, 2013). When the focus drifts away, the teacher (or a student) can bring everyone's attention back to the daily intention and how they can get back to that level of mindfulness.

In addition, adults and children can gain physical benefits from participating in yoga. The focus on cardiovascular, muscular, core stability, and flexibility are all highlighted in yoga poses and flows (Galantino et al., 2008). Yoga teaches skills in a way that is accessible to all students and does not induce inter student competition. In the classroom, students can participate in yoga in small areas such as their desk, the participation in yoga requires little set-up and minimal space per student (Peck et al., 2005). Yoga can be as easy as a small game of “Yogi says”, or a simple stretch, or a way to make the curriculum more interactive and interesting. In this way, yoga can be done multiple times per day to increase the amount of DPA students are receiving in the classroom.

Yoga has also been shown to increase concentration and mindfulness in students; if we can teach students how to self-regulate they can change their reality and their experiences. Utilizing this new skill, students are able to transform their thoughts regarding tests, assignments, and inter student conflicts (Galantino et al., 2008). Giving them these skills allows students to work out their own struggles, both internal and external.

Yoga's benefits are plentiful if used often. This handbook offers teachers lessons, activities, and other ideas of how to use yoga with their curriculum, during transitions, to wake kids up, to calm them down, and other various fun ideas! The hopes of incorporating yoga into a school setting will be to decrease mental health problems, increase physical fitness and time participating in physical fitness, teach children how to self-regulate, be mindful and create/change their realities, and hopefully empower students to live a healthy and balanced life.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

There are many reasons for developing this child-centered yoga handbook. As a participant of yoga classes, an Ontario certified teacher, certified children's yoga instructor, and a fitness and wellbeing fanatic, I have enjoyed the experiences and benefits that I have gained from yoga. I have observed the changes and benefits that yoga can bring to children as well. I want to help share and promote the benefits of yoga in the classroom with as many educators and students as I can. Children spend more time indoors and sitting down. Not only does this add physical stress to a body that just wants to move, we talked extensively about children hearing their parents repeatedly talk about stress in their own lives (White, 2009). There is an increased interest in the use of yoga for children to calm the mind and increase health and wellbeing (White, 2009). The objective of this handbook is to provide short activities, ideas, and flows for teachers to use in their classrooms to enhance children's physical and mental health. From my experience as well, using small yoga breaks in the classroom actually allows for more teaching during the day—so we can fit in more of the curricular learning.

Educators may have little experience with yoga and may be uneasy about using yoga in the classroom. I hope to provide easy ways to enable inexperienced teachers to utilize yoga into their classrooms for the betterment of their students and offer varying levels of yoga in classrooms to best fit teacher's comfort levels, time frames, and students' abilities. With help from this handbook, teachers will be able to introduce yoga into every aspect of the classroom experience for students (i.e., transitions, lessons, pretesting, and so on.)

Currently there is a fair amount of research regarding yoga with students, but it does not address how to employ the teaching of yoga in the classroom.

My objectives for the handbook are to:

1. Provide actual activities, mini flows, and poses that can be used in the classroom, along with the knowledge of HOW to use them.
2. Demonstrate, through a seminar, how yoga works in the classroom (and how yoga works in general) to assist teachers not familiar with yoga.
3. Promote mental and physical activities as an essential aspect of every child's life for his or her own physical and mental health and his or her attitudes towards both of these as he or she continue to grow.
4. Assist the teacher in planning and delivering an effective and fun program that encourages students to participate.

As a yoga teacher who is also a classroom teacher, I can see the need for yoga with students, and I have experienced the excitement that yoga brings to children but I realize that one must know yoga in order to effortlessly integrate in into the classroom. So here I present a handbook with activities, ideas, and ways to show teachers how to use yoga and when to use yoga.

Upon completion of the handbook, I shared it with current elementary school educators in an effort to receive feedback on whether or not they think this program would be effective in alleviating some of the anxiety in their elementary-aged students. I used the feedback from these educators to evaluate the resource and incorporated recommendations to improve the overall perceived usefulness of the handbook.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE HANDBOOK

Following a review of the relevant literature, and based on personal experience, a need was seen for a practical easy-to-use handbook for educators to utilize yoga in the classroom setting.

The handbook that was developed is included in this chapter.

Teach, Learn, Develop: Sweat, Breathe, Yoga

(A Handbook for Yoga in Classroom for the Educator)

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Foreword

Yoga is an enriching and novel activity that rewards students in many aspects of their lives. It enables children to learn self-regulation, to improve and enhance both their physical and mental health, alleviate stress, and create a dynamic learning environment in your classroom. This handbook is intended to help teachers begin to use yoga in classrooms by offering ideas and activities that will answer when to do yoga and how to incorporate yoga into the classroom. The ideal format of this handbook would be presented through a seminar aimed at presenting yoga in the classroom to teachers so that they can better understand the how, why, what, and when.

Thoughts on Yoga in the Classroom

There are various resources now available to teachers on how to use yoga in the classroom. You can buy books, videos, and flashcards, watch YouTube videos, and pin all the poses you want on Pinterest, but many of these are too comprehensive to use in the classroom and too confusing for teachers who are not familiar with yoga. Teachers are busy enough delivering the mathematics, literacy, social science, science, and the arts curriculums so that the day becomes too full and all that results are stressed out teachers and subsequently frazzled students.

Yoga can be incorporated into the smallest aspects of your day—even integrated into the curriculum so that students can learn kinesthetically. Yoga can help teach, and be evaluated in, all areas of the curriculum. Since this handbook also touches on how yoga can be used to learn how to deal with stress and to self-regulate, it can be used throughout the day and evaluated as a part of the provincial report card where asked to assess students' "learning skills." Using what they learn from yoga and from class, it has been my experience that students will improve in areas such as independent work, cooperation, conflict resolution, problem solving and goal setting.

Of course, not at all yoga can be taught in this one handbook, which is why it is suggested that a handbook like this be paired with a seminar to demonstrate specific ways that yoga can be utilized and to explain how it can be brought out quickly when you see attention fading, when self-regulation needs to be modeled, and does not need to be planned.

Yoga aims to improve students' mental and physical health by helping to meet the daily recommended physical activity time for students and teaching them about self-regulation: breathing and stopping, thinking and then going.

Presented below are activities that can be completed at various times throughout the day and school year. These ideas and activities are not set in stone-yoga is a fluid practice. It is up to teachers to take from this, add on, modify, accommodate, and differentiate as needed for their individual classroom needs.

How does Yoga Help? (Stewart Stanec, Forneris, & Theuerkauf, 2010)

- Yoga can help improve children's attitudes and reduce test-taking stress.
Children who use deep relaxation breathing and basic yoga at their desks to cope with stress can concentrate better.
- Yoga also teaches children how to relax during normally hectic lives. It offers alternative ways to react to situations that may otherwise cause them to reach to unhealthy habits to calm down, A proven contributing factor to stress is the use of food as an escape or as a comforter. Yoga offers new ways to relax and concentrate.
- It is easily adaptable at home and school when stress levels get too high. Yoga puts a new light on a child's world and makes it much more enjoyable. There are meditative and calming benefits.
- It improves focus, strength, coordination, balance, and confidence.
- Yoga can help children succeed in school and other activities, and it works well for children with special needs.

OVERVIEW

The activities in this handbook are meant only to give teachers ideas on introducing yoga into the classroom. Each activity can be manipulated to fit into your classroom; all ideas are just suggestions based on personal experience: what worked for me. This is not necessarily true for all teachers. I tried to make the activities easy to follow, and some activities can be used repeatedly so that they become familiar to students. Start slowly in September by just introducing the topic of yoga and what it does for your body and why you will be doing it in your classroom. Feel free to take these activities outside to get some fresh air and a change of scenery.

This is not your typical once-a-week for 30 minutes yoga program; it is a full integration of yoga in to one's classroom. This handbook is the first step to preparing a classroom for this new yoga environment.

The activities in this handbook focus on physical health, mental health, self-regulation, breathing, and/or a combination of the above. The activities are organized into different parts of the day or different situations in which the practice of yoga may be important and worthwhile. The areas/situations I have selected are as follows:

1. Self-regulation/stress
2. Morning meetings
3. When a student needs confidence/Test taking
4. To stop negative behaviours
5. Diminishing focus
6. Tired/energizer
7. Curriculum

8. Fitness
9. End of the day

Included in the handbook are printable pictures that you can use to talk about poses with students, talk about how to get into the poses, how they feel in the position, and then students can colour them and write their memory words on the page and keep a “Yoga Duo tang” throughout the year of the poses that they have learned. Once again—this handbook is not comprehensive, so feel free to have students draw their own poses and write stories about the poses. Make poses out of plasticine or pipe cleaners. Use yoga to teach procedural writing – have fun, be creative, and do not fear being silly.

Teach, Learn, Develop: Sweat, Breathe, Yoga.

Claire Mathews, a Yoga Therapist and Instructor, expresses that “children are natural yogis, they breathe properly, live in the moment, thrive on creativity and are filled to the brim with compassion...a fun yet structured yoga practice nurtures and encourages these qualities in children to grow” (Personal communication, August 28,2013).

Teach Mindfulness to Students Through Yoga
(Taken from Guber & Kalish, 2007).

1. Focus:
 - On oneself
 - On using finesse
 - On hearing and feeling breath
 - On correct alignment
 - On being supportive
2. Posture/Alignment
 - Strong foundation – feet parallel, under hip sockets
 - Knees bend inline with toes
 - Knees above the ankles when bent in standing poses
 - Legs activated – thigh engaged, kneecap up
 - Spine long – tailbone extending down
 - Stomach engaged in and up
 - Shoulders wide and scapulae moving down the back
 - Chest lifted, neck long
 - Head in line with torso, chin relaxed down
3. Breathing
 - Smooth, deep, and even
 - Filling lungs completely – notice diaphragm and ribs moving
 - To sustain focus and calm
 - To improve strength
 - To enhance flexibility
4. Quality of Movements
 - Be sensitive and slow – move with finesse
 - Be easy and graceful – connect poses and transitions like a dance
 - Be fluid, even when holding a pose – feel inner movement and breath
 - Be the pose with your whole being
5. Quality of Thought
 - Acknowledge what you CAN do
 - Be curious and willing to try and explore
 - Pay attention to sensation and let it guide you
 - Be supportive and encouraging
 - Observe your alignment carefully

SELF-REGULATION AND STRESS

Self-Regulation and Stress

Most children are unable to name exactly what stress is or how it feels (Guber & Kalish, 2007). Having a conversation about stress and what it is can really help to start off the year – children have stress but they do not understand why, and they cannot comprehend that the feelings inside of them are stress. Most of their stress is considered “everyday stress” and this can be something as little as changes to their regular schedule.

As teachers we need to model how to self-regulate – the ability to control physical, behavioural, and mental impulses. It enables students to control their emotions and be in charge of how they feel.

Self-Regulation/Stress

Activity 1: Let's Talk About Stress (Taken from KHST, 2012)

Objective:

To give students an opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings about stress (and for a teacher to get to know what they know and what they are stressed about)

Instructions:

Brainstorming: What is stress?

- Write the word “stress” on the board.
- Ask the student to tell you what the word “stress” means. For example, you could say, “We’ve all heard the word ‘stress’ before. What do you think it means?” or “When you hear the word stress, what does it make you think of?” or “Everyone has stress. What kinds of thing make you feel stress?”
- Accept several answers. If the students cannot come up with examples, share your own ideas about what stress is.

DID YOU KNOW...?

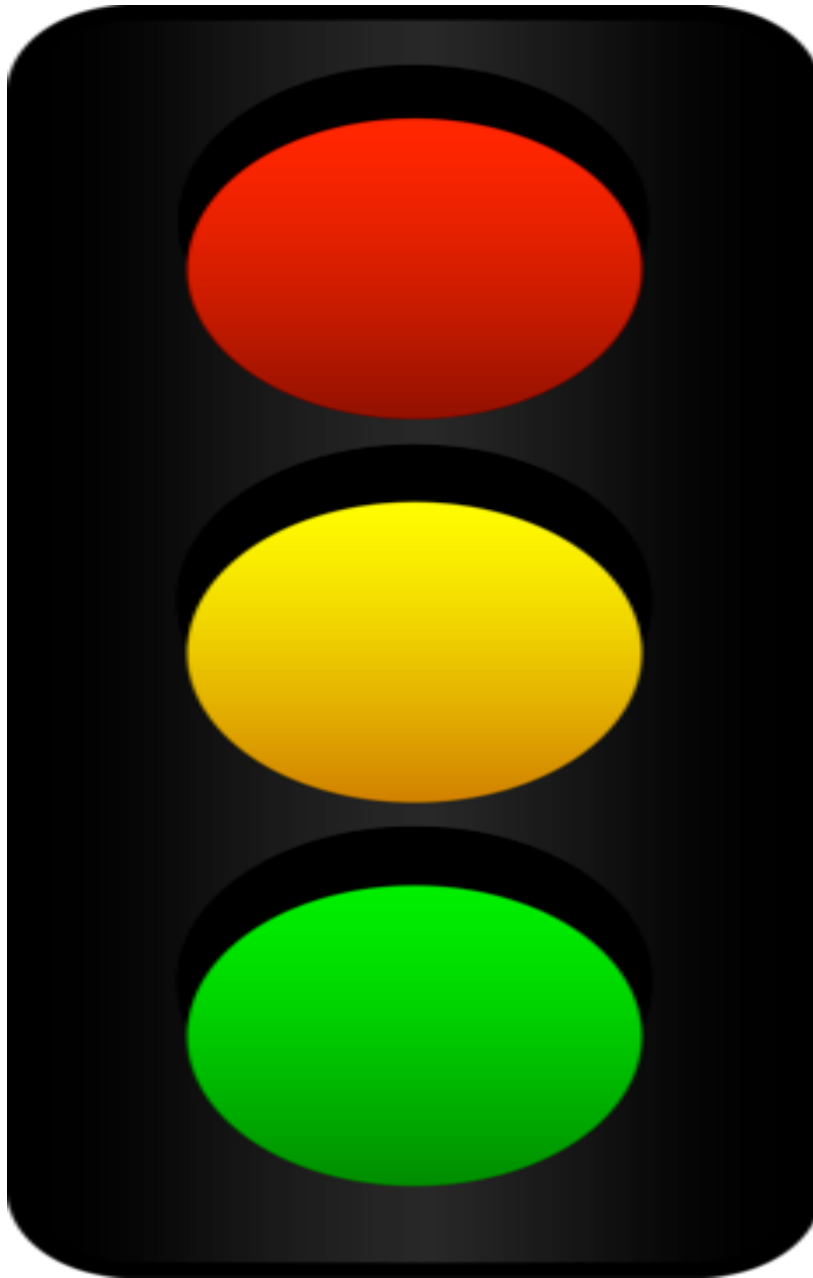
Activity: Stress and your body

- Draw a line down the middle of the board. On one side, write: How I Feel. On the other side write: What I Think About.
- Ask the students how their bodies feel and what they think about when they are stressed
- Record a few student answers on the board. For example, a student might say they feel like a volcano, or that they think about hitting something. If the students cannot express their ideas in words, ask them to show you with their bodies and then help them find words to describe their feelings and thoughts.

Stress or emotional turmoil may be the cause of some of the problem behaviours you see in your classroom. Sometimes children act out at school when they are afraid of something or are dealing with a stressful issue at home. School itself can even be the cause of stress, especially among kids who have trouble keeping up with their school-work or building close relationships with peers.

Individual activity: What does stress look like?

- Give each student a piece of paper and some art supplies.
- Ask students to draw pictures of themselves feeling stress. Remind them to show where on their bodies they feel the signs of stress.
- With the students’ permission, post their drawings for others to look at.

Self-Regulation/StressClassroom Stoplight

Red light – STOP & BLOCK

Stop your action, or thought and block it. Put an end to what is going on in your surrounding or your mind.

Yellow light – THINK

Pause and think about what action you can take now – a yoga pose, a breath, a positive thought?

Green light – GO

Use that pose, breath or, thought to continue on and move away from the negative thought or action – clear your mind.

This Stoplight (KHST, 2012), was introduced to me by an associate teacher who has pictures of poses and breaths hung up beside the stoplight. Use September to talk about to use the stoplight, examples of when you use it, and model how they can use it in

various situations or problems they have inside or outside of the classroom. Have discussions about how using the stoplight helps them, and allow them to personally reflect on its benefits.

The stoplight can be taught in September and kept up on the wall year round – keep coming back to it when students need a reminder, and be sure to have pictures of breaths or poses (to come) that they can use to make themselves feel better.

MORNING MEETINGS

Morning Meetings

Many classrooms begin with a morning meeting – if yours doesn't, these can be used in whatever fashion you like. Morning meetings can be used to start the day in many elementary schools. They provide structure for students and an easy way to talk to the whole class before the day begins.

This section will introduce the poses, a picture, along with a description of what the pose should look like.

Teach the poses sequentially first before stringing them into a flow and music so that you can ensure students are safely arriving in each position. They do not ever have to be strung together – you can use the poses in whatever fashion you would like!

Each pose can also be photocopied and made into yoga duo tangs for students in your classroom.

In traditional yoga, these poses, when strung together, are often referred to as a sun salutation; this sequence is called it the “Sun Dance” (similar to “Rain Dance”). You can even choose different movements to put together once you get more comfortable. You can do a flow a few times over to really get the kids moving!

Morning MeetingsMountain Pose

(Kripalu Yoga, 2012)

- Root your two feet hip distance apart
- Stand up tall and try to push your head to the ceiling
- Breathe deep and open your palms up

- **Morning Meetings**

Swan Dive



(Kripalu Yoga, 2012)

- With your arms extended to the sides (like a T), float down to touch your toes
- Be sure to keep your back straight as you bend over (bend at the hips)

Morning Meetings

Forward Bend



(Kripalu Yoga, 2012)

- Keep bending forward until your hands touch your toes or the floor in front of your toes
- If your hands cannot reach, bend your knees. REMIND students that yoga should never hurt, so they can make accommodations such as bending their knees

Morning MeetingsBackbend

(Kripalu Yoga 2012)

- Root down through your feet
- Extend your arms up and over your head and then look at your hands as you slowly bend backwards
- Keep a small bend in your knees as you are bending

Morning Meetings

Hands to Heart Center



(Joy, Peace and Health, 2013)

CONFIDENCE/TEST-TAKING**Confidence/Test-Taking**

All children need a confidence booster at some point when something may intimidate them, make them nervous, or just when they are entering a novel situation. Many students feel pressure and subsequently feel stressed while being tested or evaluated; some get nervous when they have to speak in front of the class. We all experience situations like this throughout our lives; therefore creating coping mechanisms now will help students conquer their fears now and later in life. Yoga requires us to slow our bodies down and exist in the present – during this process we let go of worries and stress that inhibit our thinking. As we change our inner experiences our outer experiences follow and “you increase what you are able to accomplish...by stop[ping], slow[ing] down and be[ing] fully present” (Guber & Kalish, 2007). These poses and breaths must be modeled for students but can then be accomplished on their own – talk to your class about how using the breaths and poses help them and how they feel before and after. Teach students to centre themselves with a positive intention when they breathe.

The stoplight can also be utilized in these situations by stopping and blocking the negative or failing thoughts, thinking of which of the following actions they can take, and then go ahead and use one.

Confidence/Test-Taking

Chair Pose



(Joy, Peace and Health, 2013)

- Start in mountain pose with your arms overhead
- Keeping your back straight, sit your bum back as if you were sitting in a chair
- Before a test, this pose can be done by having students hover over their chairs and breathe deeply, imagining the test going well

Confidence/Test-Taking

Warrior Pose 1



(Joy, Peace and Health, 2013)

- Start in mountain pose – step one foot back (so you're in a lunging position)
- Point the toe of your back foot outwards (while still keeping your heel on the ground as well)
- Bend the front knee, and have the back knee straight
- Lift hands overhead and reach through your fingertips
- Repeat on the other side!

Confidence/Test-Taking

Warrior Pose 2



(Joy, Peace and Health, 2013)

- Begin in Warrior 1 pose – whichever knee is bent, stretch that arm out straight in front of you, the other arm behind (at shoulder height for both)
- Turn your head to look out over your front arm
- Stand tall through your spine and repeat on both sides!

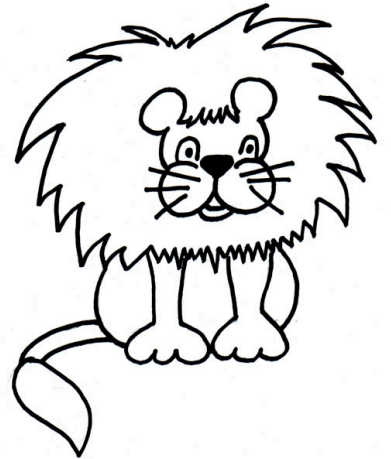
Confidence/Test-Taking

Lion's Breath

The poses that emanate confidence are the ones that have you in a strong position with your chest up and out, to show we are BRAVE.

So what better breath to practice before a big speech, a unit test, or any number of childhood stressors than Lion's Breath?

- Sit up (or stand up) as straight as you can
- Take three BIG BIG BIG breaths in through your nose as you fill your chest up and puff it out
- Then sigh all the air out through your mouth
- Repeat



STOP NEGATIVE BEHAVIOURS

Stop Negative Behaviours

Negative behaviors range from bullying to put-downs to tantrums and acting out. This is part of students learning to self-regulate their behaviours – yoga gives students an opportunity to explore how our thoughts and actions affect our bodies and attitudes.

Yoga Principles (*Guber & Kalish, 2007*)

Be peaceful/Show kindness

Be honest/Tell the truth

Be tolerant/Accept other points of view

Be generous/Share

Be clean/Take care of yourself and your community

Be content/See the positives

Be disciplined/Work hard

Be responsible/Think before you speak or act

Be reflective/Spend time with yourself

Teachers can model these behaviours as well as have discussions and lessons surrounding these topics in their classroom. As mentioned before, many yoga practices begin with an intention – some teachers may like to start the day with an intention, and these are the perfect ones to bring into classrooms of any age. Finding other books to read, examples to talk about, or ways to demonstrate these principles will help to lessen negative behaviors in your classroom over the year.

Stop Negative Behaviours

Tree Pose



(Joy, Peace and Health, 2013)

- Carefully root down through one foot and bring the toe of the other foot to the ground and place the heel of that foot on the ankle of the other – make sure the knee is pointing away from your body (turned outwards)
- As children gain confidence they can take the foot off the ground and bring it further up the calf, and finally above the knee
- Have children raise their hands above their heads as if they were tree branches, or hold hands at heart center

Stop Negative Behaviours

Partner Poses

Many poses can be made into partner poses just by standing next to one another and doing something on the opposite side – my personal favourite is to do dancer pose and have students steady each other with their palms pressed against one another. Here is dancer pose:



Game Idea:

Have students play mirror – have one student move into poses slowly and have their partner mimick their movements – its tricky for younger students because they must move opposite to their partner to look like a mirror image. (Hint.. this can be taken further into students choreographing their movements for a dance evaluation by you) (Guber & Kalish, 2007).

- Have students stand far enough apart that they are pressing against one another's hands to keep the balance and work together.

Partner Poses

Chair pose



(Joy, Peace and Health, 2013)

- Have children stand back to back
- Slowly start to sit back against one another as they walk their feet out slowly to get into a seated position – use each other to lean back against
- Working together on all partner poses is number one!

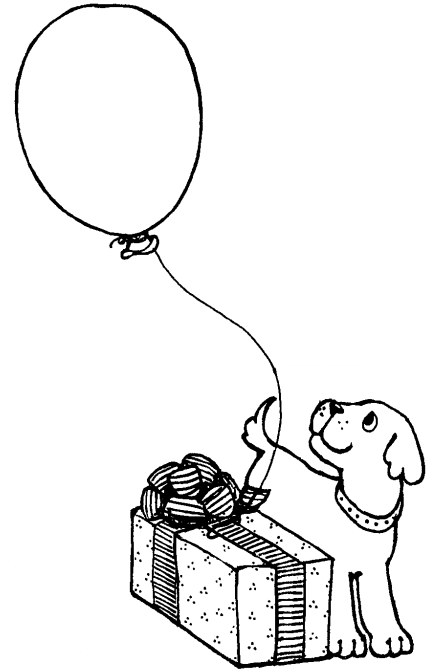
Stop Negative Behaviours

Balloon Breaths

Students need to be taught by their teachers when to self-regulate problem behaviours, thinking about the stoplight and perhaps picking a balloon breath to help calm themselves down.

Balloon Breaths:

With your hands on your belly, breathe in through your nose and fill your belly right up – feel your belly grow and then breathe out for a count of 5. Repeat and every time you breathe out, try to say a positive affirmation about the situation to yourself in your head (or aloud as a class).



DIMINISHING FOCUS

Diminishing Focus

Many times focus will be lost within 5-10 minutes of a teacher talking and therefore we need to activate our students– this can be as little as just acting out with their arms a small part of the story you are reading or doing some stretches up to the sky, out in front and to the sides while they are sitting on the carpet or at their desks – be creative. Included below are two ideas that provide a technique for promoting movement that may allow students to refocus so you can more effectively teach them.

When you choose to take a break – tell them why you are doing it, *“I see you are getting tired so lets get up and have a movement break.”* This is another way to model self-regulation. Teach students to recognize when they need a break, and encourage students to take their own yoga pose breaks at their desk (or when needed) to revive their energy and attention (use the stoplight!).

Diminishing Focus

Cobra/Upward Facing Dog



(Joy, Peace and Health, 2013)

- Have students lie flat on their bellies on the ground
- Place their palms flat on the ground underneath their shoulders
- Using their strong arms and strong bellies have them lift off the ground by slowly straightening their arms
- To increase difficulty, have students press down through the tops of their feet as well to lift their kneecaps and thighs off the ground

Diminishing Focus

Butterfly Pose



- Begin in a seated position
- Bring the soles of your feet together, knees out to the side, and bring your heels as close into your body as you (comfortably) can.
- While holding the soles of your feet together, slowly try to press the knees down to the ground and then release
- Repeat

TIRED/ENERGIZER**Tired/Energizer**

These poses are used to create blood flow and awaken sleepy minds.

These poses are meant to get children into a different position, allowing more blood flow and more oxygen to the brain. There are many other poses to explore – here I offer one pose, one flow sequence, and a small game that can be modified to play anywhere –

Once again – introduce why you have chosen to partake in these activities. Be creative with what you do, because it is not what they're doing; it is that they are doing.

Tired/Energizer

Shoulder Stand

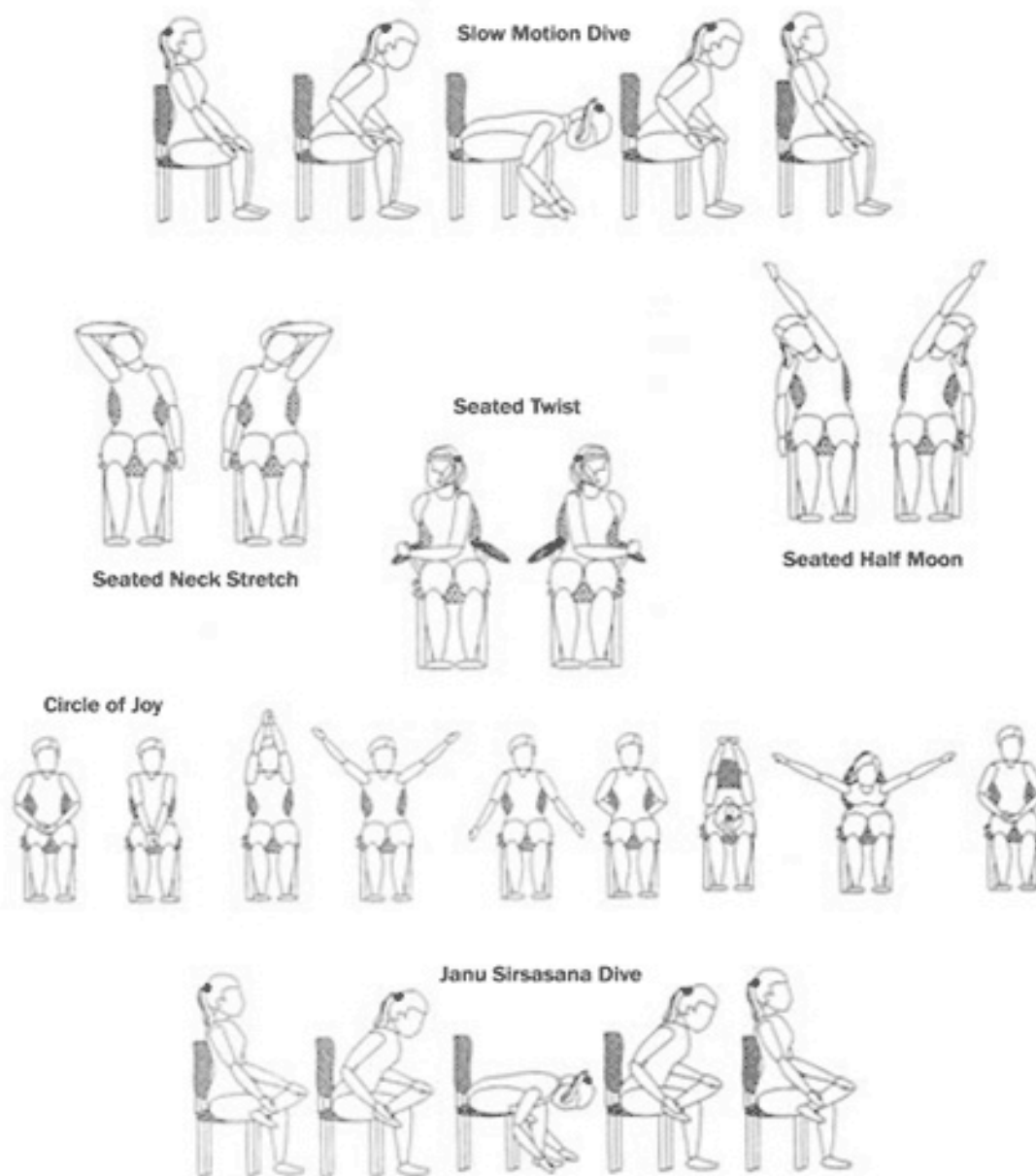


- A more advanced pose, begin with students lying on their backs and have them try to lift their legs up
- Have students place their hands on the small of their backs to push their buttocks and legs up to 90 degrees (shoulder, hips, and feet should all be in a line)

- Some students may only be able to raise their legs; offer pillows to put under their bums to accommodate. Or have students put their bum to the wall and put their legs straight up the wall

Tired/Energizer

Chair Yoga Flow



(http://alwaysbdancing.blogspot.co.uk/2010_01_01_archive.html)

- These are a few movements that can be completed while students are still sitting at their desks
- Best used before the day starts for junior/intermediate level classrooms

- Allow students to practice these on their own throughout the day as they feel they need it

Tired/EnergizerYogi Says

The following is similar to “Simon Says”; once students are more familiar with poses, you can have them stand (or sit) at their desks or on the carpet while doing this. You lead by saying, “Yogi says do tree pose,” and so on. But to make it more fun you can also add in nonsense poses such as “Be a bear” and have students show you what their bear pose would be. Allowing students to have creative initiative really helps them in their self-discovery. If you join in and make weird poses as well, it creates a fun and welcoming classroom environment.

CURRICULUM

Curriculum

This is a section that I could fill for days on end because it is really easy to add yoga to any subject if you are willing to get creative. Many of these came to me quickly and are easy to implement. I find that using yoga to teach lessons helps students remember lessons and important information much better. It is a great benefit to students who are not your typical “book smart” students. One of my favourite examples was teaching the water cycle through yoga and watching students mock act out the water cycle with their arms during the test to answer the questions – a very proud teaching moment. A moment to show how yoga helps students!

Curriculum

Literacy

I read *The Great Kapok Tree* to students in grades 2 and 3 and had them standing on the carpet while I stood on a stool above them reading the book and showing them pictures and had them become the trees and animals that we read about by posing like them. We read it through a second time, and then I took out some words (much like you do when you are sing “B-I-N-G-O”) and had the students silently act out the parts. They had a lot of fun and remembered that book for a long time.

During daily 5, I’ve had a teacher tell me that a student “read to you” by reading a book and doing yoga poses along with it.

For weekly spelling lists you can make your bodies be the letters and spell them aloud as a class while changing poses for each letter

Use the pictures in this book, and others that you find to have students colour and write journals about the poses – how they feel when they’re in the pose and what the pose does for them – be creative!

Teaching procedural writing and want to involve the smartboard? Have a student stand with his or her back to the smartboard and have another student draw a stick figure in a yoga pose. Get the rest of the class (without saying the name of the pose) get the model student to look just like the stick figure. A real challenge for students – but helps with good procedural writing skills!

Curriculum

Drama/Dance

Activity:

Prepare by having a “yoga bag” (a fun bag) filled with some small beanies or stuffies. Have students sit in a circle; predecide on a way to pick who gets to draw an animal from the bag. Give the bag to the first student who is going to choose, have him or her close his or her eyes and pick one of the stuffies – the student can try to guess what the animal is and then they can open their eyes (if the student cannot get it, have another student give him or her a hint, such as the noise that animal makes). Once the student opens his or her eyes, he or she gets to make up a pose for that animal, and then the stuffy goes into the middle of the circle and the bag is brought to the next student to pick a stuffie.

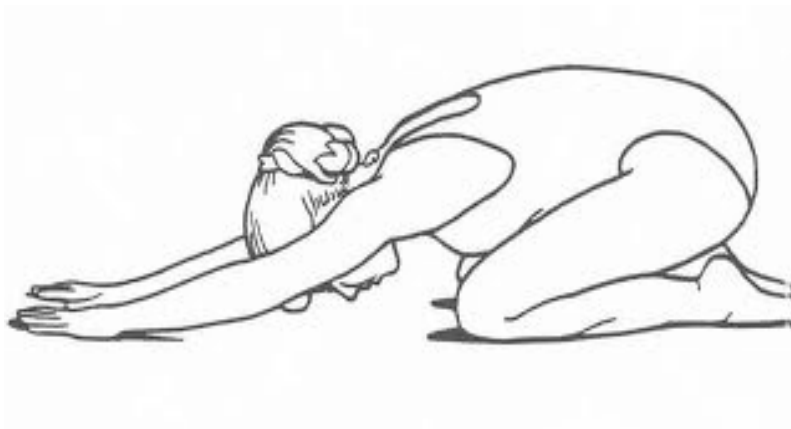
Continue this until you have 3 - 5 stuffies in the middle and each one has a pose associated with it; practice each pose and then have a student pick an order for the stuffies to go in and, as a class, put the poses together to make a flow.

Split students up into small groupings and have them create their own flows with the animals, and other linking poses can be incorporated for a small dance/drama activity.

Curriculum

Science

You can have students act out anything to help them remember it. For this – DO NOT think traditional yoga, just think kinesthetic learning. Act out the water cycle, metamorphosis, and so on.



Child's Pose

Example: Metamorphosis (Rawlinson, 2013)

Ask the children to do a child's pose. Tell them that they are chicks inside an egg and that they are floating and growing. Tell them that they are ready to come out of the egg and become a chick. Have them walk around like baby chicks. Then tell them that they are finally changing into grown roosters and hens. Let them move around now as full-grown chickens scratching, pecking, and having fun. They can try this again, this time as a different creature, like a lizard in its soft-shelled egg, a tadpole in its jelly egg, or even a caterpillar larva in its cocoon. They will have suggestions of their own as well.

Cross-curricular connection: Morphing Strips (Rawlinson, 2013)

Using one long strip of paper and coloured pencils, the children can draw out the metamorphosis of any creature they [or you] choose, starting on the left side with the first stage (e.g., egg) of the creature's life and finishing on the right with the developed creature. They may even want to do the growth of a seed into a tree or a flower instead of an animal.

Math

Example: Geometry (Rawlinson, 2013)

Warm-up: Tell the children to begin their warm-up by making a ball or circle with their bodies. Then have them stretch right out on the mat on their backs, creating a line. Then have them stand up with legs wide, arms to their sides, creating a triangle. Have them create a few more shapes with their body and then move into a little flow of poses [shapes]

Activity 1: Guess my shape.

Gather the children and invite them to each choose the name of a shape from a hat without showing it to anyone else. They must, in turn, make the shapes as best they can by using their bodies. They can pick a partner to help them demonstrate their shape when it is their turn. The other children can guess the names, and as they guess, you can draw them on a large board or easel to show them to the class. (Use shapes that are three-dimensional like cylinder, cube, pyramid, rectangular prism, sphere, ellipsoid, ovoid, etc.) The children can later draw all these shapes if they like.

Activity 2: Piece the puzzle.

Draw a large, multiple piece puzzle on Bristol board consisting of triangles, squares, and rectangles of various sizes and then cut them out. Have a “control” Bristol board for later with the original puzzle drawn on it. Each child will receive a piece of the puzzle, and as a group they can work to fit their shapes together. Finally, when they are finished, give them the “control” picture so that they can check to see if they have built the shape correctly. Let them experiment, removing a few pieces of the puzzle to create a perfect square or a perfect rectangle. Let the children explore on their own.

Curriculum

Social Science

Example: Countries of the World (Rawlinson, 2013).

Warm-up: Where in the World.

Give each child a picture of either a continent or an ocean of the world (cut these out from construction paper beforehand). Display a large drawing of a map of the world (just outline of continents and oceans) on the floor in front of the children. Ask the children, one at a time, look at the map on the floor and then place their piece of the world where it goes (superimposing it). Each child places his or her puzzle piece where it goes, and then they name it together. Finally, the world is complete, and you have made it together!

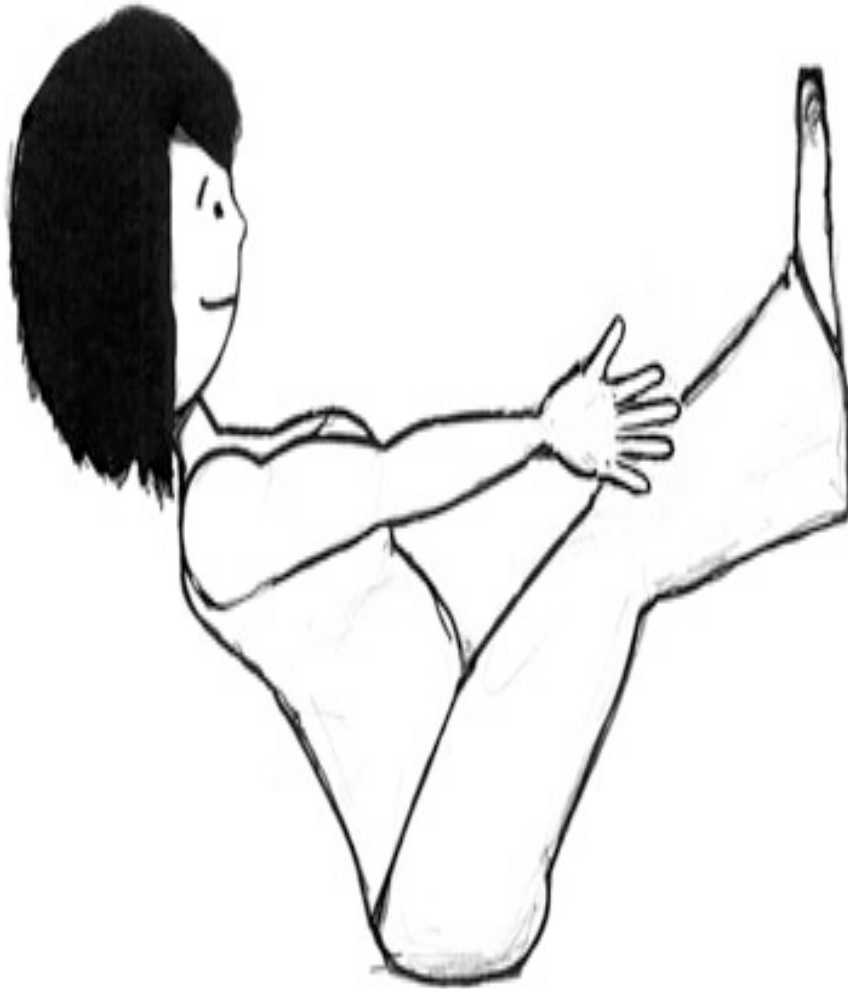
Activity: Passport Game.

In advance of the class, make each child a little blank passport made of construction paper (a stapled paper booklet with eight pages). Tell them that they are travelling and need to stamp their passport as they arrive at each stop they are visiting. Place eight hula-hoops around your room, with a stamp or a sticker in each showing a pose (e.g., dog or cat pose; have a picture of the pose as well. Place an ink pad in the hoop as well if you are using stampers. The children will travel (dance) around the room as you play music, and when you turn it off, they should stop in a hula hoop and do the pose that they find there. When they have done the pose, they can stamp their passport or place the sticker of the pose in their passport. They are then ready to travel again and stop at a new hula-hoop. As the music plays, you may suggest that children change the way they travel. They can pretend to fly, travel in a boat, or move as a land creature. Continue on in this way until the children have visited all the hula-hoops and have filled their passports.

FITNESS/DPA

Fitness/DPA

The recent trend of yoga focuses on its physical domain and the benefits that can be derived from doing yoga classes. It is difficult to hold most students' attention long enough to complete an entire yoga class, but playing yoga games allows students to work on the same physical aspects that a yoga class would normally – cardio, flexibility, and core strength. Presented here is once pose or activity for each of the above domains.

Fitness**Core**

(Joy, Peace and Health, 2013)

- Sit on the ground with your knees bent together in front of you
- Extend your arms out front (at shoulder height)
- Lift your toes slightly off the ground and find your balance on your bottom bones
- Once balanced, try to straighten your legs

- Game – popcorn: Have students start in boat pose and then pull their legs in and wrap their arms around their legs and bring them into their bodies, and then lengthen out into a long boat pose – legs and head hovering over the ground. When you say “corn” have the students pull themselves in tight, and then when you say “pop” have students fall out (in a controlled manner) into extended boat pose.
- This really works core strength for students
- To modify this pose, students can keep their hands on the ground near their bums and just pull their legs into their body and push them out

FitnessFlexibility

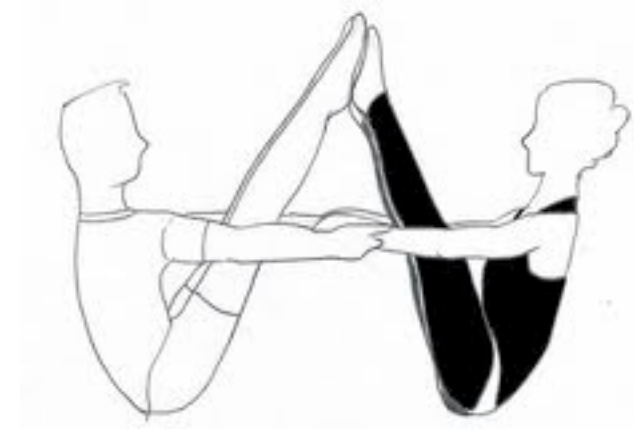
- Begin on your hands and knees
- Hands should be under your shoulders – fingers slightly spread – distribute your weight through your hands (pushing down through your fingers)

- Lift your knees off the floor, raise your tailbone and buttocks toward the ceiling – draw your abs up and in
- Straighten legs and put your heels down or keep knees slightly bent and heels off the floor (beginner option)
- Gently press tailbone upwards as you lengthen through your legs and arms
- Keep your head looking between your feet
- Do not have students hold this for longer than five breaths.

Fitness

Cardio

Create three partner poses that children can quickly and easily get into – modify depending on the grade that you are teaching. It is similar to the game Joust, Knight, and Steed. Students are in partners and must not stay with their partners the whole time. Have music playing and students moving about the gym in whatever manner you choose (walking, running, skipping, hopping, etc.) but make sure they separate from their partner. When the music stops you yell out one of the poses you covered and students must find their partners and get into the position – the last group to get into position is “out.” (I split the gym in two and have one side the active side and one side the “out side” – this way all students can play the entire time.



Be Creative – Have Fun

END OF THE DAY

End of the Day

At the end of the day, depending on the age in your classroom, there are a few things you can do to end the day and send students home calm and ready for their evening activities.

- Corpse pose (Savasana) is the most common pose to do at the completion of a yoga practice – it calms children down and allows them to have time to settle their minds
- You can use corpse pose as a game (Graveyard, or Wax Museum). Have one student walk around and find the "corpses" or "statues" that are moving
- Do a small flow with a song to end the day on a high note and have them going home happy and positive
- Eagle pose

End of DayEagle Pose

- Stand in mountain pose
- Place your left leg over right leg
- Take your right arm under left arm
- Bend your knees slightly as if you were sitting back in a chair
- Keep back straight

Make sure to do both sides!

End of Day

Yoga Flow

The four poses needed for “Our Smart Flow”

(Karen Wright, Personal Communication, 2013)

Flying Bird Breath

1. Stand with feet hip width apart.
Straight back
2. Keep arms hanging straight down
beside body.
3. Take deep breath in through nose
while sweeping arms away from
body and up overhead slowly.
4. Bring hands to touch above head.
Breathe out slowly while bringing
arms back to side.

Waterfall

1. Stand with feet shoulder
width apart.
2. Reach straight arms above
head. Bend forward at hips.
3. Reach down to ground, knees
bent slightly.
4. Swing arms gently behind
legs. Come back to standing.

Flat Back

1. Stand with feet hip width apart.
2. Reach straight arms above
head. Bend forward at hips
3. Reach down to ground. Touch
floor, then lift head and arms
from hips until parallel with the
ground.

Washing Machine

1. Stand with feet shoulder width apart.
2. Stretch arms down and away from hips
about 10cm.
3. Keep legs straight and twist body at hips
to the right.
4. Turn back to centre and twist to the left.

End of Day

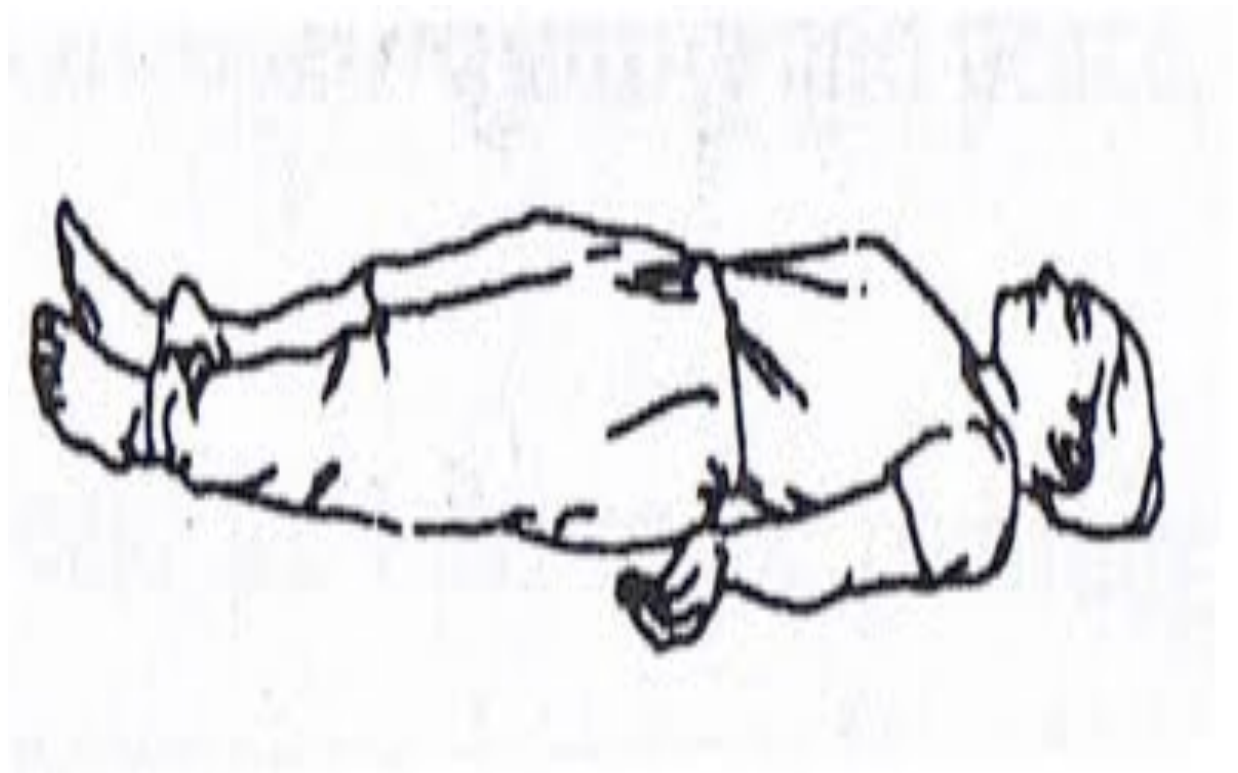
Our Smart Flow

I reach high to the sky (Flying bird breath)

I reach down to the ground (Waterfall)

I reach out to see (Flat back)

How smart I can be (Washing Machine)

End of DayCorpse Pose

- Have students find their own area to lay on their backs
- Palms facing upwards, and let your toes fall open
- Play relaxing music and turn the lights down
- Some yoga teachers like to give students a small forehead or neck massage during corpse pose

When's Savasana?

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CHAPTER FIVE: EVALUATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was an examination of a child-centered yoga program within the school setting and was particularly aimed at providing a yoga program that combined the mental and physical domains of yoga for educators to help meet the needs of their students. This handbook was aimed at helping educators introduce yoga and self-regulation into their classrooms.

The handbook was created as a full program that teachers could implement into their classrooms to teach self-regulation through yoga. The program tried to be direct and succinct so that it was easy to understand and easy to use for teachers who are not familiar with yoga and for all teachers who are more than busy with teaching everything else they are required to fit into a day.

Throughout this process I have worked closely with a grade 2 teacher from a school located in Southern Ontario. Together we have had many indepth and lengthy conversations about getting more (in our hopes, all) classrooms to be using yoga in the classroom. We share similar views on why yoga should be used in the classroom (for children's mental and physical health and to teach them how to self-regulate) and how yoga should be used in the classroom (small amounts, often). Sharing this vision is how I created this handbook.

As I was developing the handbook aspect of this endeavor, this teacher was creating a workshop in order to teach this style of yoga to other eager teachers in their school board looking to incorporate yoga into the classroom. Therefore many aspects of this handbook we discussed prior to development, but the finished product was presented to her for final critiques and recommendations.

I will begin with my own critiques and future steps that I hope to take with this. As I have mentioned, I believe that this handbook would not be truly effective without being accompanied by a workshop or seminar for teachers for them to fully immerse themselves and feel some of the poses and understand on a different level reasoning's behind the positions and activities. I think that this is imperative because this handbook (and many other handbooks that teachers are given) take too long to read, and I believe that if teachers are not involved in yoga themselves, they will not have the prior knowledge needed to execute using yoga in the classroom.

My teacher mentor offered me her insight after reviewing the handbook, she agrees, after running a workshop herself that "There is a need to a run a workshop so the teachers can experience ... because if they can feel it and do it they will believe it more." I attended her workshop and wholeheartedly believe that the teachers who attended her workshop got more out of those 3 hours than they ever could have from reading this handbook front to back three times.

Many discussions brought us back to talking about this initiative not being mandated in the curriculum, and therefore we have to work harder to have teacher, buy in to the idea of wanting to use this in the classroom. As a novice teacher, I believe that it is a program that will speak for itself, but my veteran teacher advised me that I would be hard pressed to find teachers who would try it themselves before believing in what it could do for their classrooms. She suggested focusing more on self-regulation and to make a catchier title such as "Do you need more time in your day?" They need to know HOW it is going to benefit them in their day before they will be willing to take time out of their day to read it.

Karen likes the idea of the printable pictures but thinks that I should create a deck of these yoga poses on hard-card paper so that they can be used in the classroom as visual aids; students can physically grab them and do a pose to make it more interactive and give them a role in making their own decisions without always being told which pose to do—they can pick from a pile themselves.

A major criticism of this handbook my teacher mentor had was that I do not offer more ways to have students identify when they need to get more control over their brains and actions. We both think that some of this cannot be communicated through a handbook and, again, this may be where a workshop would complement this handbook nicely. She commented how many teachers discuss the lack of self-regulation with which students come to school. Since it is something we need to teach and model in our classrooms, providing teachers with ways in which to teach and model this more clearly would be of benefit.

My teacher mentor expressed that she would most definitely elicit the use of this handbook/program in her classroom. She told me her reasoning for so emphatically wanting to implement this handbook in her school: “This is a new thing we have to put into our days, we are putting out fires that kids should be putting out themselves. We don’t have enough time [to handle all these issues] in addition to all the mandated curriculum we have to provide each day. SO I would use it because I have found this is my own 23 years of experience.”

There was one more important critique brought to my attention: safety. It is extremely important, and I was wondering about it myself. Many teachers will not be certified to help students safely get into the positions. Upon further reflection, the only

position that would be considered a pose of risk in this handbook is shoulder stand.

Putting a warning on this pose or taking it out for the benefit of teachers and the safety of our students may be necessary in a second edition.

My hope for this project would be to have another teacher try to use it in his or her classroom over the period of an entire school year and have him or her evaluate the program. I would like to make the program accessible for all teachers to use—whether they do yoga themselves or not.

In my vision, yoga (in some way, shape, or form) will be present in many, if not most, schools. I would love to refine my project, create cue cards, worksheets, and other artifacts to go along with it to present to teachers in workshops, and go around to different school boards presenting this way of teaching in the classroom.

I think that what I have presented here is more than “just yoga”; it is a way of teaching and a new culture that can be presented to schools. If we can enhance students’ mental and physical health and teach them how to self-regulate their feelings, we can change the way these students perceive stress and how to deal with this now and in the future.

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